

CULTURAL HERITAGE

A little bit of China in Manila

Manila presents a modern ambience beneath which one finds basic Filipino touches and familiar Chinese, Spanish and American influences. In Chinatown, in particular, one senses a sharp contrast between the modern facade of the metropolis and the quaint, 19th century Chinese district.

The Chinese in the Philippines by their length of stay and their various contributions to the nation may be considered a local sector of the national community yet, strangely, the Chinese have remained "foreign," Daniel Doepfers, an American sociologist, in his study of the historic growth of Philippine cities, points out the fact that Chinese immigrants tended to settle in well-defined regional clusters which remained stable in their make-up through 80 years. Alfonso Felix, Jr., in the book "The Chinese in the Philippines," writes that the non-assimilation of the Chinese may be circumstantial as it is cultural. The history of the Chinese in the Philippines reveals numerous instances when they had to virtually coalesce to overcome discrimination, particularly legislative discrimination.

Admittedly, however, Chinese influence in the Philippines has been "deep and extensive," pervading many aspects of Philippine culture, including language, customs, beliefs, economy and medicine. Wealthy Chinese businessmen, as the late Roman Ongpin, contributed large sums to the revolution and, at least, one Chinese immigrant, General Fawa, was known to have actively fought with the forces of General Antonio Luna. We learn that as early as the 6th and 7th centuries, the Chinese have been to various parts of the country trading silk, ornaments, tea, and gunpowder for Philippine gold, indigo, rattan, shells, ebony, bird's nests and lead.



Mainstreet, Chinatown: Novel idea for a "ghetto."

Viewed along these considerations, the Chinatown Development Project is not simply a scheme to beautify the old Chinese district but a conscious effort to thaw the barrier that for years have kept the two peoples apart.

Manned by a trisectoral committee composed of the City of Manila, the Filipino-Chinese Community, and the Department of Tourism, the project is geared toward developing Chinatown as it evolved in Manila. As conceived, Chinatown shall "depict how the Chinese in the Philippines contributed

to the emergence, development, and progress of the Philippine nation."

The development of Chinatown is divided into two phases: a) the more immediate, that is, the reconstruction and the restoration of buildings typically Chinese, and b) the more permanent and long-range aspects like the revival of certain typically Filipino-Chinese festivals, the construction of actual life-sized copies of Chinese sampans and others.

Phase One of the project includes the re-routing of traffic, the repair of

streets, the improvement of the drainage system, and the cleaning of the esteros by the city government. The Filipino-Chinese Community, for its part, will take charge of retouching the facades of Chinese buildings, the revival of Chinese festivals, and the construction of permanent arches or gates at the entrances to Chinatown at Rosario, Ongpin and San Fernando.

Phase Two lists, among other projects, the reconstruction of: a) the Alcazar de San Fernando, a combined customhouse — wholesaler and living compound in Binondo in the late 1950s. b) the Tribunal de Sangleyes, the Chinese court, along San Fernando Street, and c) actual life-sized models of Chinese sea-going vessels and sampans.

The development of Chinatown has drawn the interests of various sectors of the country, particularly the First Lady. For her part, Mrs. Marcos donated P4 million for the cleaning and dredging of all the esteros in the area. Mr. Tang Tack, secretary-general of the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce, pledged full support to the project while Minister Yu, speaking in behalf of the Chinese, said: "We will do all we can to help realize the laudable project."

As agreed by the planners, the ground-breaking ceremony will be held during the "August Moon Festival," a favorable time according to Chinese belief. Specifically, it will be on September 11, thus coinciding with the birth anniversary of the President.

A whole day affair, it begins with the cornerstone-laying pinpointing the site of the first commemorative arch, a display of the model of the gate and, most probably, a tour of Chinatown itself. A program featuring Chinese cultural dances and a lantern contest will follow in the afternoon.

The development of Philippine Chinatown, Secretary Aspiras said, is in line with the plan "to preserve and develop Manila Chinatown as part of the nation's cultural heritage."

PEOPLE

Sentiments range from elation to nostalgia. "I still can't believe it!" enthuses former Manila newsmen Mike Ligon, at the cleanliness and signs of progress in metropolitan Manila. He had been staying in Canada for the last three years. Another newspaperman, Emiliano Francisco, waxed nostalgic. "I have been away for 48 years, and that certainly has been a long, long time. I will be happy to bring back home my family and convince the rest of the people in my community to remove their doubts about returning to the Philippines." For M.H. Jacoban of Bataan News in Sacramento, California, his trip is one "long overdue," and for Jose Esmilla the Philippines is a fondly remembered Pagsanjan Falls. Tony Reyes is all agog. "It's terrific — I feel like staying for good." A motley group of around 30, these newspapermen and various personalities have come to the Philippines upon the invitation of President Marcos and Tourism Secretary Jose Aspiras. They are to spearhead "Balik-bayan," a program to bring home for a visit as many overseas Filipinos as possible between September

this year and February 28 next year. Incentives include reduced airline fares, a tax holiday and hospitality discounts. With all these, Filipinos abroad may yet fulfill their yearning to return, an archetypal rebirth — in their own time.

Margie Moran and Eugene Torre had something in common: both came back to the Philippines within the week. Eugene Torre, a chess luminary at 21, returned at 3:00 p.m., August 27, after a year-long chess activity that had him winning chess wizards in prestigious European tournaments, including former world champion M. Tahl, his idol, whom he beat in the interzonals in Leningrad. It was a beaming Torre that came home after winning the 10-man Orense tournament held in Spain only last August 24. Meanwhile, Margie Moran had her share of adulation when she came home August 30. Preparations for her arrival had been made by Tourism Director Jose Clemente, the Bining Pilipinas contest executive committee, Malacañang representatives, PAL officials, representatives of mayors, et al. These included a motorcade from the airport to the Manila Hilton with an escort in full

regalia, a courtesy call on the First Family, a luncheon-press conference afterwards and another luncheon hosted by Tourism Secretary Jose Aspiras. After all, Margie's face (and figure) is one to launch a thousand to do's.

While overseas Filipinos and luminaries are coming in, four Makati cops are going out — but for good reason. Police Chief Ruperto B. Acle, Lt. Col. Armando C. San Miguel, Captain Luis Lambrento and Lt. Romeo Peña are off to the United States and England to undergo specialized police training courses. Acle will train for three months at the International Police Academy in Washington, D.C. on police management and administration. Lambrento and Peña will train in the same institution on budget and narcotics administration, respectively. San Miguel, for his part, will attend a 15-week course on traffic management and supervision at the Branhill Police Academy in Hampshire, England. Following this, San Miguel will make an observation tour on traffic systems and procedures in Bangkok, Teheran, Athens, Rome and London before he returns to the Philippines. Who

ever said police work cannot be improved?

Filipinos are like Italians — "sunny, always smiling, and warmer than the climate."

This was the observation of Msgr. Bruno Torpigliani, 58-year-old papal nuncio to the Philippines who arrived last month to assume his new post, vice Msgr. Carmine Rosco. The Spanish envoy said Filipinos exude an "unmistakable charm" compared to the "rather reserved" attitude of peoples of the countries he had visited. Msgr. Torpigliani served as apostolic envoy to Guatemala and El Salvador in South America and Zaire in Africa and worked in pontifical representations in Colombia, Peru and England before he became papal nuncio. The multi-lingual ambassador — Spanish, French and English — said "I don't feel like a stranger to your country." Although this was his first trip to the Philippines, the envoy had been working with the Vatican secretary of state which used to handle church matters in English-speaking Catholic countries, including the Philippines. "That made me deeply attached to Filipinos," he said.